Be attentive to the call of Christ

*I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.*

 Romans 9:1-3

Paul has great sorrow in his heart for his fellow Israelites who have rejected Jesus as the Messiah; as their Saviour. He even goes so far as to say that he would be willing to be separated from Christ, if only the rest of Israel would come to Him. That is hard; that is a love that can only come from the Holy Spirit.

For us, we are not called to be separated from Christ. We are called to follow Him; to be saved by Him. This needs to be our first order of business: Our own salvation. As Jesus told Peter, “You follow Me.”

But next comes the great commission. We are to go and make disciples of all the nations. We are to share the Gospel with others as we have opportunity. Most of us will never reach the multitudes Paul and Peter did. Most of us will never reach the number of people some of the modern evangelists have. But that is ok. We are to share with those whom God puts in our path, be they few or many.

To be effective in this however, it would be good to pray for the Lord to imbue us with a burning desire for souls. A love for others as deep as Paul had for his fellow Israelites. When we love other people as the Lord does, and we know what their future holds, we are strengthened and encouraged to tell them of the offer of eternal life.

We are to plant the seed; occasionally water; but the Lord God causes the growth.

In Christ’s love

John

 3-12-23

John 13:1-20

As we quickly come to the celebrations of our Saviour’s atoning death and resurrection, it seems good to consider what took place immediately before these things. We are all familiar with what we call the Last Supper. The Last Supper was a Passover celebration that God commanded the Jews to celebrate annually to remember their deliverance from Egypt.

This Last Supper was very important because it signified the world’s final escape from the captivity to sin. As the first Passover meal was the beginning of the Israelites escape from slavery to Egypt, so the Last Supper was the fulfillment of that prophecy; our final escape from the slavery to sin and death. It was also the last meal that Jesus would have, before He finished the work that the Father had sent Him to do.

Verse 1 makes it very clear that Jesus knew exactly what was going on. He knew this Passover celebration would be His last; He knew that His very hour had come. Jewish reckoning began a day in the evening. So, by the end of this very day, Jesus would be dead and buried in a tomb. But it would all take place in perfect obedience to His Father; in incomprehensible love for those He would save; and would appease the wrath of God on behalf of all who would confess Him Saviour.

Of the twelve men gathered together with Him, Jesus knew that one of them would betray Him. One of those who had traveled with Him for almost three years would turn Him over to death. One of those who had even been given the authority to heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons; would sell Jesus, and his own soul, for 30 pieces of silver. And Jesus knew who it was.

The action that Jesus took here in our reading for today is deep in meaning and has several purposes. One helps us to understand the total forgiveness received through Christ, yet the constant need for us to confess and repent.

Hebrews 12:10 says, “*but [Jesus], having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.*” So, by the one sacrifice of Jesus, all sin is atoned for, regardless of when committed. As Jesus mentioned in verse 10, one who has bathed, that is been cleansed by Christ, is completely clean. Still, the clean person who walks the dusty roads of life will get their feet dirty. Although we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus, we still sin as we go through life. It doesn’t affect our salvation, but it affects our relationship with Jesus. We need to have our feet washed. Therefore we have 1 John 1:9, “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*.”

We get our feet dirty daily. That is why, even though we are clean and saved, we need daily confession of sin and repentance.

Also, in the tradition of the prophets, Jesus was acting out prophecy; He was acting out a parable. The prophet Isaiah walked about naked for three years to demonstrate that the nation of Egypt was going to be taken captive by Assyria. The point being that Israel was foolish for depending on them instead of the LORD. The prophet Ezekiel had to lay on his left side for 390 days and on his right side for 40 days, to give a visual representation of the siege of the two kingdoms of Israel.

In the washing of the disciple’s feet, Jesus acts out a parable for them. He is their Lord and Teacher. He has taken the place of the lowest of the slaves, the one who would wash the dirty feet of any guests coming into the house. He had to dress the part, get down on His knees before each of them, and wash the dust and grime from their feet and dry them with the towel He was wearing. In this parable, He taught them how they should behave toward others.

But what He acted out was also prophecy. Not only was He their Lord and Teacher, He was almighty God. He had dressed Himself in servant’s clothing; human flesh. He humbled Himself to the menial task of washing away the grime and filth of our sins. Jesus was acting out His leaving the glory of heaven, becoming one of His own creation, and suffering the humility of crucifixion that would bring about our salvation.

But don’t miss that when He was done, Jesus put His outer garments back on and reclined again at the table. He resumed His position as Lord and Teacher. Also, once Jesus had completed His work on the cross, He arose from the grave and ascended back to heaven. He went back to where He started, receiving His true power and glory, seated at the right hand of the Father.

It is hard for us to consider that the almighty God of the universe would become one of His own creation and allow Himself to be humiliated by us, just to offer us salvation. But that is what He did. It is worth dwelling on that idea. To do so allows the Holy Spirit to work in your heart, renew your mind, and give you more of the sense of awe that our Lord and Saviour deserves. It also helps us to develop a mindset of serving others to the glory of God.

This story is famous for the reaction of Peter. We can picture the other apostles remaining still in stunned and embarrassed silence as Jesus washed their feet. But not Peter. Peter is well known for opening his mouth and placing his foot in it. Peter is an inspiration and an encouragement to us. If the Lord could use him, He can use any of us. And the Lord did use him in mighty ways.

In spite of his folly, Peter delivered the first sermon at Pentecost, bringing thousands to Christ. He was the first to bring the Samaritans into a saving relationship with Jesus. He was the first to preach the word unto salvation to Gentiles. This impetuous man, in spite of being placed in the leadership position of tending the sheep by Jesus Himself, became humble enough to refer to himself as a “fellow elder” to those who weren’t even apostles, and submit to the authority of James as leader of the Jerusalem church. He came a long way, and Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, will bring us along too.

First, Peter refused to let Jesus wash his feet. And really, we can understand this. Would you not protest if Jesus came to you and wanted to wash your feet or clean your house or take out the garbage. Peter understood that Jesus was holy, that He was the Son of God, and Peter loved Jesus. He didn’t understand everything but he knew that much. And he didn’t want his Lord and Teacher, the Messiah, to be taking the part of the most menial servant.

So in verse 8 Peter tells Him, “*Never shall You wash my feet!*” Pay careful attention to the words with which Jesus responds, “*If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me*.” Notice that Jesus didn’t say “wash your feet” but He said “wash you”. None of us will have any part with Jesus unless He washes us in His blood. Only believing on Him for salvation; believing that the sacrifice of His blood is what it takes to be made clean before God; will give us an eternal part with Jesus.

Characteristically, Peter misunderstands and opens his mouth wide to make room for his other foot. He wants Jesus to wash the rest of him because he desperately wants to be a part of his Master and what Jesus is about. But he still focused on the water in the pitcher before him. He didn’t think about the sprinkling with the clean water of Ezekiel 36:25; he didn’t think about the atoning death Jesus was about to undergo and had told the disciples about several times.

Jesus had to rein him in. Peter was cleansed due to his belief in Christ, as were all the others in the room, save one. Jesus used this opportunity to let the apostles know that He had a betrayer in the room; indeed, he was one of the twelve. It seems they missed this point until later when Jesus brought it out clearly. Still, it was important for Jesus to bring it up now and to show that it was fulfillment of prophecy uttered by David in the Psalms.

Here is something John doesn’t specifically spell out in his account of the Last Supper; but we know it is there and it makes us uncomfortable: Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, almighty God in the flesh; knelt before Judas Iscariot and washed his feet.

Jesus knew full well where He was heading that night and what would befall Him. He knew that it would come about through the actions of Judas. Satan was behind what was going on, but Judas had full responsibility for his actions. He had chosen to see what he could get out of betraying Jesus to the Sanhedrin and had decided that 30 pieces of silver was enough. His desire for money had overpowered his desire for the things of God: And that is the naked face of greed.

Yes, Jesus knew what He was coming to earth to do; He knew that He would face the heinous death on the cross; He knew this had been prophesied centuries ago and had been determined by God since before creation. Yet Judas was the one through whom all this took place by his own decision. Yet Jesus washed his feet.

How gracious is our Lord and Saviour. He offers cleansing to even the most vile of sinners. There is no one He will not offer salvation to; there is no one He will refuse who comes to Him in humility. This is the kindness, the mercy, the longsuffering of our God. Dwell on these things also.

There is something important for us to learn and put into our life’s practice. Keep in mind that the Bible is not just a list of good things we are to do. The Bible reveals God to us; the unknowable God is willing to let us know some things about Himself. This is amazing. The good things we are to do have deep meaning. That’s why understanding what is going on is essential.

So what can we take from this; what does it teach us to do? In this acted out parable, Jesus is an example for us. Remember that our goal is to become more like Christ; so, we do the things He did. We are called to wash the feet of others. Take that in a metaphorical sense. Jesus and the apostles are clear that we are to be servants to others. Especially to our brothers and sisters in Christ, but not limited to them.

Jesus washed the feet of the eleven who were faithful to Him, but He also washed the feet of His betrayer. And this is hard. There are people we don’t want to help, there are things we don’t want to do. But Jesus left us with this example and we, as Christians, are to do it.

When you are dining at a restaurant and the waiter or waitress drops a tray, do you get up from your seat and help them pick up the mess? When your neighbor’s garbage can blows over, do you go set it back up and pick up the trash? If your neighbor down the road, who is a jerk, loses his pet dog, do you bring it back to him if you see it?

And these are just some physical things. A few weeks ago when I was at the elementary school, one young fellow went on a tirade about our current president. I took the opportunity to explain that the Bible tells us that we ought to pray for our leaders, whoever they are. He responded, “There is no way I’ll pray for Joe.” While this response may appall us or amuse us, how often are we guilty of this same mindset? Jesus told us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Do we do that?

All of us seek God’s will for our life. We want to find that special thing that He has called us to do. And that is fine. But in the meantime, the Bible is full of things God has called each of us to do. Do you believe the Bible? It is easy to answer “yes”; but are you proving it by following the example of Christ? James tells us that faith without works is dead. Even Jesus asks, “*Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?*” (Luke 6:46)

The Christian life is not simple and tidy. We are called to get messy. We deal with and love other fallen human-beings. And that is never neat. For encouragement: God the Holy Spirit graciously dwells within us when we receive Christ as Saviour. Without Him, our task of being like Jesus would be impossible. But He brings us along, according to His timing and according to how much we cooperate.

Prayer

Lord God, Your precious word calls us to renew our minds. Our minds are tainted by sin, they are warped by evil. From the beginning of our lives we are drawn to wickedness and rebellion against You. Thank You that our minds can be renewed; thank you for Your word which breathes life and freshness into our minds. Thank You for Your commands that offer our minds freedom that can never be obtained through the darkness they contain by nature.

We are called to avoid being conformed to the world. This world is under the influence of the adversary; it is opposed to Your righteous rule. Yet Your word and Your commands keep us from conforming to the ways of the world; saving us from the destruction to which it is heading. Thank You for teaching us the way to eternal life, which can never be obtained by the ways of this world.

You know, O Lord, and we have thankfully come to understand, that we desperately need You to guide us in everything we do. Help us now, to actually do what You tell us. Strengthen us to wash each other’s feet. Open our eyes so that we can understand what Jesus has done for us, so we can gratefully and joyfully be His disciples. Thank You Jesus, for Your cleansing blood; poured out on the most unworthy of Your creation.

In Jesus’ name we pray

Amen